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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001268

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [PTER](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: QARADAWI VIEWED LOCALLY AS A MODERATE SCHOLAR

REF: A. DOHA 1056

[1](#)B. DOHA 1226

[1](#)C. 04 DOHA 1417

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Dr. Yousef al-Qaradawi is the most influential Muslim scholar in Qatar. His positions on social issues are seen as moderate by his followers. He plays an important role in Islamic banking in the country. His personal wealth is due to favors bestowed by the ruling Al Thani family. Some local Muslims acknowledge his religious expertise but question his "political" rulings and criticism of the U.S. He has been described as a politician maneuvering to increase his base of support. Few here believe that Qaradawi is a danger to society because he might tempt youth to go to Iraq to fight in the insurgency. End Summary.

Qaradawi Finds Refuge in Qatar

[1](#)2. (C) Dr. Yousef al-Qaradawi, 79, comes from the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt. At odds with Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime, he came to Doha in 1962. He developed strong ties with Qatari leadership that continue to today. He was granted Qatari citizenship in 1968 by Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani who was then Heir Apparent. Qaradawi has been granted other favors by the Qatari government; in particular, he was given substantial properties including villas, which he rents, and the building which houses the Ruling Family Council, an organization of the Al Thani family. We have no figures on Qaradawi's income, but it is substantial.

Arabic TV

[1](#)3. (C) Qaradawi by title is professor of the life of the prophet Mohamed at Qatar University, but he no longer teaches in the classroom. Qaradawi's most visible presence is through the weekly television show "Sharia and Life" on Al Jazeera. He is the primary, but not exclusive, guest on this religious program which reaches millions of Arab viewers. The program, in the interview format, deals with current topics that can cross into the political spectrum. Qaradawi has his own program on Qatari TV, called Guidance of Islam, in which he responds to letters seeking guidance on a range of religious issues. This program is not political. Seen on regional satellites, the program reaches a wide audience. Qaradawi maintains an international presence as a founding member of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, based in London, and the European Assembly for Legal Opinions and Research, based in Dublin.

Popular in the Mosque

[1](#)4. (C) Through these two television programs, Dr. al-Qaradawi maintains a significant international profile. Locally, his influence is perhaps greater. Unlike in Saudi Arabia, there are few preachers of any stature from any political persuasion in Qatar. Qaradawi stands out. The Grand Mosque, down the road from the Embassy, is filled on Fridays when it is known in advance that he will be giving the sermon and leading the prayer. During Ramadan, the Grand Mosque is host to the most intense evening "tarawih" prayer; it is fully attended as Qaradawi leads the prayer and gives a sermon afterwards.

Condemnation of London Bombings

[1](#)5. (C) Because of his local prominence and because of his close ties to the Qatari leadership, he is regarded as the "mufti" of Qatar -- authorized to make religious pronouncements on behalf of the state, even though there is no such official title. For example, Qataris and other local Muslims look to his advice on financial investments. Earlier in 2005, Qaradawi pronounced permissible buying shares in the hot Qatari stocks, Qatar Industries and Qatar Gas Transport Company, thus permitting Qataris to partake in these lucrative IPOs. Almost all Muslims believe he is moderate on strictly religious issues: He is not overly quick to prohibit an activity; he accepts the role of science in many issues such as bioethics; and he supports the role of women in the workplace. Most recently, he condemned the killing of the

Egyptian Ambassador to Baghdad and and the July 7 bombings in London. He criticized Qatari landlords who raise rents too rapidly and impose hardship on local tenants. Another example of his religious moderation: During a visit to Algiers at the end of June, he supported eliminating the study of Islamic law from the Algerian high school curriculum (in favor of specialized study at the university level).

16. (C) The rapidly-growing Islamic banking industry in Qatar offers a prominent practical role for Qaradawi that gives him substantial visibility. He is on the Islamic Law advisory boards of Qatar Islamic Bank, Qatar International Islamic Bank, and Qatar National Bank (QNB). He performed the ribbon-cutting at the opening of QNB's Islamic division. In truth, it would be nearly impossible for these Islamic banks to find a substitute for whom customers would have the same level of trust.

17. (C) While moderate on the issues mentioned above, he stands out as a critic of Israeli actions in Gaza and the West Bank. He does not accept dialogue with Jews unless they have demonstrated that they do not accept "Zionism" (ref A). He has stated this position publicly, and in line with it, he did not attend the Dialogue of Religions in Doha in June 2005 (ref C) because of the participation of American and French Jews.

Critics of his Political Positions

18. (C) Other locals -- including both Qatari thinkers and expat Muslims -- are critical of Qaradawi for taking on political issues. Some comment that his positions are not logical: he called for a boycott of American products, for example, while his children were travelling to the U.S. to study in American universities. He came under some criticism, particularly from the Kuwaiti press, for his position in support of the insurgency in Iraq. Arab newspaper reporters sensed that his "clarification" of a reported fatwa on the targeting of American civilians was muddled (ref B); in the clarification, set up as a press conference, Qaradawi condemned the taking of French and Italian hostages while avoiding any condemnation of the taking of American civilians. The former dean of Islamic Religion at Qatar University makes the argument that Qaradawi's position on Iraq is a danger to confused local youth. However, this liberal approach gets no traction in this conservative society, and the former dean is viewed as a mouthpiece for the American point of view.

19. (C) There is also the view that Qaradawi is simply a politician whose maneuvers are made to maximize his popularity and strength. In this view, positions on Iraq, Israel and Palestine, and the U.S. will reflect popular feeling rather than provide intellectual leadership. If new ideas come to the Arab street, Qaradawi will probably be too old to be an opinion leader.

Comment

10. (C) Yousef al-Qaradawi is the one Islamic thinker in Qatar who matters. The others are distant also-rans. It is apparent that local Muslims and Muslims in Qaradawi's wider audience view him with a wider lens that brings in his expertise on religious matters. For this reason, he is called a moderate by many, and indeed he is when compared to some hard-line preachers in Saudi Arabia. The logic of his argument that the United States, as supporter of regional dictators, is the primary source of ill in the region is being outpaced by a more sophisticated call for reform in some countries. We would like to see Qaradawi enter this debate, but so far he has not done so.

UNTERMEYER